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THE WAR HAS NOT DESTROYED

II. Man's Belief in His Attainment unto Truth

BY ARTHUR DEERIN CALL

The Nature of Truth

MAN's belief in the efficacy of public education, or, for that matter, in anything worth while, would be inexplicable were it not for his faith in the power of the human mind to attain unto truth. And when he says truth, he means something real. If he is unable to define it, he apprehends its meaning after a fashion. He looks upon it as the unified and cosmic thing for which schools and courts and churches exist. He says of it that it is the idea, the logos, the philosophical macrocosm toward which all his little efforts tend. He believes that it partakes of the very essence of life itself, the sun and center toward which the eyes of men of all times have been wont to turn. The search for it is of the greatest human interest to him, for the reason that it is his utmost personal concern.

He prefers not to quibble over terms; and yet, as pointed out by Mr. Upward in his fascinating book entitled, "The New Word," truth may be technically limited to the sphere of motives. One speaking with honest motive, it may be said, tells the truth, irrespective of what one says. Hence Mr. Upward believes that another word is needed to cover the exact nature of the thing which is said. If, as may be agreed, one speaking honestly speaks truthfully, even if what one says may not be true, then there must be some word to describe the nature of the thing stated. Mr. Upward suggests the word "verihood." Needless to say, the searcher for truth uses the word truth in the sense of verihood. It is the truth, verihood, seen at its best in quantitative experimentation such as is employed by the physicist, the chemist, and at last somewhat by the psychologist, that is the very woof amidst the warp of the human strife to live. War has not destroyed the hope in a moral world of truth based upon facts and concrete results. On the contrary, this war has shown the supreme importance of expert knowledge and skill, without which truth is a diaphanous thing indeed.

The basic agreement of the various historical attempts of men to form a moral ideal lies in this, that each of those attempts was simply a struggle toward the truth as its proselytes at the time saw the truth. If fundamental differences among the followers have existed, they have consisted not so much in the aims and ends sought as in the differing degrees of prominence each has given to the special cast of mind it especially believed in at the time. The common goal, the conscious or unconscious hope in them all, has been the search for truth. Out of the frost, fire, tempest, the valorous spirit of the Norseman found a heaven for the brave and a realm of death for the base. Upon that truth human society is largely built. Arabia found a divinity in patience, a sacredness in duty, and a celestial hope in a one God. Paganism gave to the world the State, the family, the school, the laws of property. Greece, quite devoid of what is termed the spiritual in

life, free from self-consciousness and soul struggle, found truth in harmonious development of mind and body, in self-control, serenity, and beauty. Plato stood for justice, temperance, prudence, fortitude; Aristotle, magnanimity. In the statuesque simplicity, harmony, and restraint of the Greek lies truth and a perfect rest. The Greeks attained unto an adequate realization of a limited ideal, not only perfection in external form, but an indescribable inner repose and dignity. Such was the contribution to truth out of Hellas.

In Medieval Europe, men brooded upon bliss, judgment, redemption, creation, heaven. Not Aristotle's magnanimity, but poverty; not joy, but mourning; not pride, but meekness; not the acclaim of one's fellows, but righteousness; not success and culture in any worldly sense, but mercy and purity; not mind and body, but the spirit; not rules of philosophy, but the simple principle, "Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them"; such was the trend of life in western civilization from the death of Socrates to the Renaissance. In complete antithesis with the Greek ideal, this new message of love, purity, human brotherhood, emphasizing the dignity of each immortal soul, was a new contribution to truth that has ever since been hovering over, if not possessing, the world.

Out of the conflict between these various interpretations of truth, through the influence of Francis of Assisi, Cimabue, Giotto, there then came the strange awakening called the Renaissance in Italy. This awakening reached Germany and transformed a world religion; spread to France and began a world revolution; extended to America and established human political freedom. Because of that awakening, creeds are changing still. New arts, philosophies, and literatures have come into being; sciences, politics, laws and inventions. With all their mixture of self-interests and ambitions, wars reveal man's anxious struggle for freedom and truth. The war just passed may itself be connected in some mysterious way with another great intellectual awakening now upon the world. If not, and we are too near the events to judge accurately, a great intellectual awakening is sure to follow. There is a great truth, albeit unknown, in the human struggle through which civilization has just passed. Men will discover that and solve their problems better because of it. There is a light from every facet of the diamond of truth. As men gather these rays, they see more and more clearly the meaning of life. This very process is the worthiest thing that men do. Believing in a unity, a sort of monism, a cosmical order of life, a

"One God, one law, one element,
And one far-off divine event
To which the whole creation moves,"

men reach for it, and call it truth.

That the war has turned the eyes of men and women more intently toward truth was inevitable. The sorrow of it alone would have accomplished that. They that mourn would know the truth about the causes and the meaning of their pain that they may be comforted. Too, they are already demanding that their suffering shall

not have been in vain, that the forces of darkness shall give way to the truth.

The Ever-present Responsibility

So, since the war has not destroyed his faith in the ultimate realization of truth, it has not destroyed man's responsibility to pursue it. No mere negative position in this prime business is now tolerable. His job now is to find what should be done, what portions of it he can do, and to do it. Go to work! That is the proper answer to the Bolshevik doctrine that every man must work with his hands until he is sixty-five. That is the performance which he must conscientiously go about if he is to profit by the mistakes already made in the interpretation of truth, mistakes which have of late destroyed many of the most precious possessions of the race. History, the facts of science which are themselves history, the empyrean—he needs them all; but just now the practical need is to bring his empyrean to earth, that it may here and now enable him to saw his wood or plow his gardens as unto his needs, to be sure, and yet also as unto the truth.

This means for the individual not merely mechanical and perfunctory performance; it means an active realization that the successful man is the man in love with his work; that, as Ruskin saw, work without beauty is indeed brutality; that he who does his work as unto truth is true; that small ideas are of the savage inheritance in us, while large ideas produce Periclean epochs forever around them. When truth becomes the conscious goal of man, then his responsibility is plain.

Liberalism in the Saddle

As following the wars of the Napoleonic era liberalism spread rapidly through the Christian world, so following this war liberals are already increasingly active. The conservatives are on the defensive. The world is sweeping on to new and different thoughts and deeds. While many long for the goodness which they attribute to the past, others are pressing toward the hope in a golden age yet to be. Mr. Kidd's law of "projected efficiency"—namely, that organisms which change to the advantage of organisms yet to come, themselves, by that fact, tend to survive—has gripped particularly the youth; and the youth, better organized and more vocal than ever, are the heralds of liberalism. It is the youth who are urging that something heroic be done that the world may not return to the methods of a doubtful past, but that it shall advance to the new and untried. Thus the day of the liberal is again at hand. The old order has discredited the conservatives. Sloth and indifference must not now block the way, for there is nothing more obvious than that truth is mighty and destined to prevail. The people who, as Goethe describes, are afraid to brush away the cobwebs for fear the ceilings will fall will need to bestir themselves. With Douglas Jarrold, the liberals are after those people who find nothing of worth in the new moon because of their deep veneration for that sacred institution the old. If the conservatives constitute the balance-wheel of the race, the liberals propose to see that that wheel revolves a little faster. And this is easily understandable, for

a sluggish dread of new ideas murdered Socrates, and Paul, and Jesus. It must not murder again the peace of the world. The metallic rigidity of narrowing notions must be broken down. Through the truths of liberalism—many of them half truths only—we discern simply the disposition to apply the lessons taught by the travail of the last five years. The doctrine of fatherhood as the highest sovereignty, and of love as the highest of all laws, may soon be given a chance to prove themselves. Neither ease nor extermination, but each for all and all for each, is liberalism at its best. "A man is fed not that he may be fed, but that he may work," said Emerson. The hope of liberalism is centered in the faith that all worth and progress lies in a dynamic procession toward a greater and a greater light. The liberal is as Job's charger, pawing in the valley, rejoicing in his strength, mocking at fear, and turning not back from the sword, as he smells the battle afar off. He looks upon himself as a special pursuer of the Holy Grail, which we all call truth. He feels a personal and peculiar responsibility to emphasize the truth as he sees it, for it is to him the watchword of all possible advance.

A Matter for Meditation

But, be he liberal or conservative, it is not easy for man to advance the truth. Ordinary ideas are passed from person to person without difficulty, but to communicate inner, personal, esoteric truth is both difficult and rare. One reason for this is prejudice. With carefullest attention to the mechanism of expression, fashioning the truth in a garment which shall call least attention to the garment, grouping words for color, interest, and sincerity, often fail to remove this prejudice. This prejudice often grapples with the advancing margin of hopeful spirits in their conflict with error; so much so that often the only comfort for one honestly laboring with the problem is one's simple belief in the ultimate victory of truth. Quintilian defined an orator as a "good man versed in speaking." By the same token the consolation of them who aim to promote truth is often little more than a faith that if they really have the truth and live it, then all the prejudice in the world cannot prevail against it.

But there are intellectual obstacles also in the way, and often more disheartening than prejudice. Adjust methods as he may, present the truth in such forms as opportunity may offer, make it attractive by every imaginable device, yet an impenetrable darkness often defies him. Then again he can only fall back upon his belief that the ought to be shall be realized some day; that the new light may be nearer than he suspects; that truth is on the way.

But such consolations are largely of the imagination merely, and their validity is easily open to question. Yet the normal man, if indeed he be normal, feels that his life presents infinite possibilities for development and perfection. He believes in a piety not only for his heart, but for his head. He is often convinced that his intellect is drawn toward the truth, and that his simple duty is primarily to get out of the way. Certain writers have convinced him that his unrestrained self will choose

wisely, see and create beautifully. He is led to believe, therefore, in a doctrine of "divine immanence," that truth is more present to all things it makes than anything unto itself can be, that there is a stream of tendency whereby all things fulfill the law of their being, that truth works in him to will and to do of its good pleasure. Out of the disciplines of his schools, his readings and personal contacts, he thinks he sees himself thus in the pursuit of truth. The newspaper is to him a window to his soul. If he strive to earn a livelihood and to keep out of jail, he does not ignore the nature of his livelihood, nor forget that through it all he is in the continuous process of self-adjustment to truth—intellectual, emotional, and volitional truth. He realizes that the enduring institutions which man has made exist that truth may be better understood and felt and willed by the race. The forms of knowledge—printing and all the things that are printed—do not exist for their own sakes, but for the sake of truth. To bend these forms in the direction of truth, he says, is to save one's self from wrecking on the shoals of spiritual mediocrity. These things are in the main constitutional with a normal healthy man who is permitted to read and to think.

By meditation one comes also to sense a poetry in truth. Poetry, called by Poe "the rhythmic creation of beauty," is of the very soul of truth. To be in sympathy with truth thus becomes the goal of life, the mark that distinguishes the person from the brute. Meditating upon truth, one turns to Shelley's *Defense of Poetry*:

"A poet participates in the eternal, the infinite, and the one. . . . A poem is the very image of life expressed in its eternal truth. . . .

"Poetry is ever accompanied with pleasure; . . . All spirits on which it falls open themselves to receive the wisdom which is mingled with its delight; . . . Poetry is the record of the best and happiest moments of the happiest and best minds. We are aware of evanescent visitations of thought and feeling . . . but elevating and delightful beyond all expression; . . . It is, as it were the interpenetration of a diviner nature through our own. Poetry thus makes immortal all that is best and most beautiful in the world. . . . Poetry redeems from decay the visitations of the divinity in man.

"Poetry turns all things to loveliness; it exalts the beauty of that which is most beautiful, and it adds beauty to that which is most deformed; . . . its secret alchemy turns to potable gold the poisonous waters which flow from death through life; it strips the veil of familiarity from the world and lays bare the naked and sleeping beauty which is the spirit of its forms."

The Hope of It

Thus if one is to attain unto truth, one shall need to get the truth sense, recognize one's responsibility, be liberal enough to welcome it when one finds it, and go after it. But, furthermore, if one is to get it, one cannot be too skeptical of the human mind's ability to discern truth. The gloom of pessimism is very depressing, the logic of it being that it is better not to live than to live. Sully, in his "Pessimism," has a translation from the

Italian poet Leopardi of a poem entitled "To Myself," which reads:

"Rest forever heart; enough
Hast thou throbb'd. Nothing is worth
Thy agitations, nor of sighs is worthy
The earth. Bitterness and vexation
Is life, and never aught besides, and mire the world.
Quiet thyself henceforth. Despair
For the last time. To our race fate
Has given but death. Henceforth despise
Thyself, nature, the foul
Power which, hidden, rules to the common bane,
And the infinite vanity of the whole."

This is the same view taken by Arthur Schopenhauer, arch-pessimist among the philosophers.

As with Schopenhauer, so with man; it is not difficult to be disputatious, splenetic and unamiable, preacher of darkness and doubt. Environment, including indigestion, may easily lead him to conclude that there is nothing in life, and who thinks he finds it only deceives himself. To look upon human beings as "worthless factory wares," to find in them nothing but malice, ignorance, and mediocrity, especially when he remembers his own weaknesses, may easily become natural. Probably every one who has reached middle life has had his moments when he could sympathize with Schopenhauer's description of the "masses" when he says: "They are sociable from vanity, compassionate from self-love, honest from fear, valiant from cowardice, benevolent from superstition; . . . the many are like sheep, cowardly, stubborn, and narrow; a few like wolves and foxes, ferocious and deceitful."

This attitude of mind toward one's fellows, if it be an attitude of mind, is a fact, and a fact cannot be described as true or false. Skepticism and optimism are mere states of mind, one as much a fact as the other. Which shall be man's depends upon his state of mind. The criminal looks upon every one as a criminal. Prisoners consider themselves as differing from others only in that they have been caught. Licitious persons believe little in virtue; but the clean see much cleanliness, the just much justice, the righteous much righteousness, in the world. Reality, therefore, is what persists within the mind. As has been said, there is no reality save that which may be called "impregnable persistence in consciousness." It is out of this content of consciousness that the rational life is evolved, pessimistic or optimistic; that truth is attained.

Whether or not life be made up of more pains than pleasures, is not easy to decide. In his famous chapter on *Pessimism*, Paulsen sets forth the difficulties with great skill. Drawing up a suggestive table of pains and pleasures for a given day, he says:

"Imagine the average day of an average human life treated according to such a scheme! We might have an account like the following: A. Receipts in pleasure: 1. Slept well—equal so many units; 2. Enjoyed my breakfast; 3. Read a chapter from a good book; 4. Received a letter from a friend, etc. B. Pain: 1. Read a disagreeable

story in the paper; 2. Disturbed by a neighbor's piano; 3. Received a tiresome visit; 4. Ate burnt soup, etc. The philosopher is requested to insert the amounts in the proper places.

"But that is an absurd and childish demand, you say! I certainly agree with you that it would be an absurd undertaking. But the demand itself does not seem to be absurd. If it is wholly impossible to make a statistical estimate of the pleasure and pain quanta, how can the assertion be proved that the pains exceed the pleasures? If it is impossible to fix a definite value for the separate items, how can the value of the totals be compared? If we are utterly unable to handle the simplest cases, if we cannot even say whether the pleasure yielded by a good breakfast is greater or less than the pain occasioned by burned soup, how can we make even the faintest conjecture in more difficult cases? How can we, if we are unable to compute the results of a single day, dare to assert anything concerning the results of an entire life; and then not of a single individual life, mind you, but of all human lives?"

Even failure cannot be accepted as a rational basis for hopelessness and despair. Finer and finer certainties of effect, successes, depend for their very existence often upon failures. The world order immediately preceding 1914 failed. There is no doubt of that. But because of that terrible failure men are already reaching toward a higher interpretation of truth. Skeptical they will remain—skeptical of the old order; but social and political knowledge have increased by the breakdown of the conditions that were. History, self-interest, and common sense teach that as a result of this tremendous experience social ideals and processes will from now on lead toward a clearer perfectability of humanity. It is no paradox that most successful personalities of history have been magnificent in their failure. The eternal youth, *élan vital*, will not long remain cast down by the failure of the attempts hitherto to run the world. On the contrary, the youth will accept that failure as their challenge. As Whitman has pointed out, the quality of truth in man is great. He and it are in love, and they never leave each other.

"O, truth of the earth; O, truth of things! I am determined to press my way toward you.

Sound your voice! I scale mountains or dive in the sea after you."

Intellectual Honesty

But if in man's search for truth he refuse evidence simply because it does violence to his preconceived notions, he will probably lose it. Now is not the time, now, when even Newton's long-accepted law of light is being questioned, when Sir Oliver Lodge is telling us that there is energy enough in an ounce of matter to raise the German fleet and to put it on the top of a Scotch mountain, to expect truth from mere rules and dogmas as such. Rules are necessarily composed of words, and words fade or take on new color with the passing of the years. Mere words, therefore, cannot be fixed symbols. Infallible revelations of truth tend to defy language. Language, like the forces of life, is dynamic in character. There is no need for infallibility

outside the mechanical world. Infallibility may be and should be predicated of a watch, but not of life. Fixed and changeless rules for the guidance of men do violence to the principle that the letter killeth, and that it is the spirit of rules which giveth life. The unusual unrest just now is for the most part an indication of the will among men to strive toward the things which are before. The judicial attitude of sincerity, impartiality, candor, with no conviction so fixed that evidence to the contrary is inadmissible, is needed just now, perhaps more than ever before in the history of the world. Since truth is elusive, needing constantly to be pursued, men may well shrink from expressing themselves just now with finality about it. This does not mean that they are to drift with the tides, but, as Theodore Munger once said,

"When storms have swept away compass and quadrant and chart, the sailor still steers the ship and watches for some opening in the clouds that may reveal a guiding star; he scans the waters for sight of some fellow-voyager, and at night listens for the roar of breakers; and so, by redoubling his seamanship at all points, finds at length his course."

Mr. Walter Lippmann, writing in the *Atlantic Monthly* for November, 1919, says thoughtfully:

"Liberty is the name we give to measures by which we protect and increase the veracity of the information upon which we act."

Government may safely suppress opinions, he further points out, but the deadly thing is to suppress the news.

In time of war, men surrender their constitutional rights to the welfare of the State, including their right to freedom of speech; but in times of peace these rights return. Now, if ever in all history, it is of prime importance that men's speech shall be buttressed upon facts, if humanity is to attain unto its "loftier walls and wider floor." The war has demonstrated the value of technical exactness. The time is at hand when men must be intellectually honest with themselves, when they must develop, employ, and trust specialist service all along the line if they are not to be forever victimized by criminals and utopias.

A Measure of Magnanimity Also

The advancement of truth depends also upon man's ability to take an opponent's point of view with perfect honesty and fairness. Carlyle's capacity to search out the truth in such divergent sources as Scandinavian mythology, Oriental paganism, Islamism, in men so far removed as Dante, Luther, Knox, Rousseau, Cromwell, shows to us the spirit. In the study of any segment of life, a labor movement, peace and war, *vers libre*, the essential thing is to look at truth through the eyes of as many people as possible, be they fellow-church members or not, and to do this with perfect fairness and magnanimity. It was a natural thing that Aristotle should make magnanimity the very flower of all the virtues.

Furthermore, one will lose truth if one denounce re-

flections as wrong simply because for the time they seem to lead one into darkness. It is not tangible ground for criticism of another that one does not understand him. The kindly Socrates had considerable trouble to understand the teachings of the vague and weeping Heraclitus. But, in place of condemning him out of hand, the magnanimous sophist expressed himself as much pleased with those portions of Heraclitus which he did understand, and, he added, that no doubt he would be as greatly pleased with those portions which he failed to comprehend. He did confess that to read Heraclitus seemed "to require a good swimmer."

It is of importance to overcome the agony of the suspended judgment, for suspended judgment is quite necessary if one is to pursue successfully the trail of truth. It is littleness to pigeonhole and to condemn too readily. The ordinary view of Schopenhauer is a case in point. It would be decidedly unfair to judge Schopenhauer by those traits most familiar to the uncritical. Closer familiarity with this person, born the year before the United States Constitution and dying the year before the Civil War, reveals him a beneficent influence, reasserting the sentient world when such reassertion was needed, laying bare real wounds in the life of human kind. He shocked men into thinking. Alongside his realism he nourished an idealism which gave a new meaning to duty. Wisdom is slow to denounce where it does not understand. If men are magnanimous, they will in the presence of the unknown exercise patience and a suspended judgment.

Again, the pursuit of truth means to distinguish between sham and sincerity. Real worth is not a slow coach, and becoming modesty is not a humbug. There is a delicacy and a refinement about the garment of truth.

Some hard-headed man of business, writing in a newspaper some time ago, expressed himself something as follows: There were two men playing billiards. One of them played as he dressed, for the evident purpose of attracting attention to himself; while the other attempted no fancy shots, but did his best to pull out every count in sight. He won the game. There was a football contest going on. One fellow on the losing team was a gallus chap, who bowed to the applause from the grand-stand, who thought apparently only of the appearance of his actions in the processes of play. The captain said afterward that that fellow lost the game for his side. Here is a handsome salesman—dapper, witty, attractive to the girls, who listen and giggle. The proprietor says that that clerk is the poorest salesman in the store. Over there is an advertising man, who coins brilliant sentences and jingling verses. His employer says he is looking for a writer who can convince readers and bring business. Indeed, he who aims to attract the most attention to himself has reversed his engine on the road toward truth; while the fellow who has wood to saw and saws it is face forward to the things that count.

Being is far more effective than pretending.

Democracy and the peace of the world require that men shall condemn in others and in themselves all

thoughtlessness in these high things of truth. Thoughtlessness may be a species of insulation by which children are protected from unreasonable adult demands, but for adults the need to shake themselves out of thoughtlessness just now is imperative. Even the thoughtlessness of youth disturbed Ruskin into his well-known condemnation:

"I had infinitely rather hear of thoughtless old age, and indulgence due to that. When a man has done work, and nothing can anyway be materially altered in his fate, let him forget his toil, and jest with his fate, if he will; but what excuse can you find for willfulness of thought at the very time when every crisis of fortune hangs on your decisions? A youth thoughtless, when all the happiness of his home forever depends on the chances or the passions of an hour! A youth thoughtless, when the career of all his days depends upon the opportunity of a moment! A youth thoughtless, when his every action is a foundation-stone of future conduct, and every imagination a foundation of life or death! Be thoughtless in any after years, rather than now, though, indeed, there is only one place where a man may be nobly thoughtless, his deathbed. Nothing should ever be left to be done there."

Conclusion

If America is to attain unto a greater social health and fuller happiness, a richer creative service, a democracy that shall by its fine qualities continue to win the honor and the emulation of other nations, she must acknowledge increasingly the human value of truth wherever found. With meditation, faith, intellectual honesty, trying as best they may to avoid the Scylla of over confidence and the Charybdis of a benumbing doubt, leaving behind the issues that are dead, marshaling their energies with large and open minds, distinguishing between the hopeless struggle of mere selfishness and the wholesome championship of the common good, men may now take up again the joyous quest for life, and believe with Keats that,

"Beauty is truth, truth beauty—that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know."

The war has destroyed much, but the war has not destroyed man's confidence in the ability of the human mind to attain unto truth. We must be quite aware that if we are to become a community of free persons indeed, if we are to develop understanding communications that shall give to us a co-operative industry and a healing emotional sympathy, truth must become the possession of the majority. When the truth is sufficiently clear, literature, science, art, including political organization, will cease to be the slaves of material greed, and men will exalt and perpetuate individual initiative, family honor, national loyalty, human freedom, and the peace of justice. Whether it be of men or nations, it is true, as phrased in the motto of the Irish Earl of Belvedere, that "Truth gives wings to strength."

Surely some such things as these must have been in the mind of the world's greatest law-giver when he said to those Jews who believed in him: "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."